

THE ADVENTIST

Adventism in the Present Tense

Pondering Our Pasts, Plotting Our Futures | BY MALCOLM BULL AND KEITH LOCKHART

Editor's note: Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart were the keynote speakers at the 2007 Adventist Forum Conference in Santa Rosa, California. At that time many of the attendees requested copies of their remarks which were not recorded. We are happy to share the full text of their presentations below.

Adventist Pasts 1: Comparisons

Although Seventh-day Adventists are in many ways indistinguishable from their fellow Americans, it is what is distinctive that gives Adventism its unique history and identity. On the other hand, the fact that Adventism is in some respects unique does not mean that it is incomparable, and it is possible to give some indication as to where Adventism is located on the spectrum of American religion.

This can be done theologically, historically, and socio-logically. What can be said about Seventh-day Adventism

from each of these points of view? To which other groups is it similar, and to which dissimilar?

Theology

Adventism is undeniably a Christian church, and unmistakably a Protestant body. Over the years, some of its critics have claimed that certain beliefs are somehow unChristian or unProtestant, but this is rhetoric without descriptive value. Adventism has no roots in any religious tradition except the Christian one, and no beliefs derived from any except Protestant sources.

But to what Protestant family does Adventism belong? Adventism's theological heritage is eclectic, yet it is still possible to isolate three main formative traditions.

1) Apocalypticism In one way or another, Adventists have always been concerned with the end of the world. This is a preoccupation with deep roots that cut across

AGES OF ADVENTISM

denominational boundaries, but it does distinguish Adventists from the many contemporary Christians for whom the end of the world is not a pressing issue, while aligning them with the apocalyptically oriented strand within American fundamentalism—though not its dispensationalist form.

2) Primitivism Many of Adventism's distinctive doctrines can be explained by the desire to do away with the accumulated accretions of Christian tradition and follow the example of the primitive church of the New Testament as closely as possible. To this impulse can be attributed Adventism's adherence to adult baptism, the non-immortality of the soul, its now disregarded anti-Trinitarianism, and the doctrine of the Sabbath. Many outsiders suppose that Adventism must have roots in Judaism, but this is not the case. Adventist seventh-day Sabbatarianism is a legacy of the primitivist impulse it has shared with other descendants of Puritanism, such as the Baptists. It is this that distinguishes Adventists from all those Protestant bodies—Episcopalians, Lutherans, even Presbyterians and Methodists—for whom Christian tradition remains in varying degrees significant.

3) Holiness Adventism has never just been about preparing for the end and being like the earliest Christians. It has also been a search for personal salvation, and in this regard, Adventism's heritage is the Arminian, Wesleyan tradition of which Ellen White was an eloquent exponent—a tradition in which salvation is an ongoing, life-transforming process. Adventism's historic alignment with this strand in Protestantism distances it from all those groups from the Calvinist tradition, i.e. most seventeenth-century Puritans and their Congregationalist and Baptist descendents, as well as the European Reformed churches and the Presbyterians.

History

These three theological traditions were not freely selected from across the total range of options available to Christians across history. They were live options within a particular time and place—the United States in the nineteenth century.

1. Adventism's apocalypticism is a legacy of the Millerite movement, a heritage it shares with the Advent Christian Church, the Christadelphians, and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

2. Primitivism was a characteristic feature of the Second Great Awakening, and of groups calling themselves Christians, or Disciples. It was mediated to Adventism by James White and Joseph Bates, both active in the "Christian Connection." The Christian Connection has disappeared, but other groups, the Disciples of Christ (now known as the Christian Church) and the Churches of Christ survive.
3. The Holiness tradition is rooted in Methodism, but the Second Great Awakening gave rise to a new interdenominational movement, the legacy of which includes groups such as the Church of the Nazarene, and, in the twentieth century, includes Pentecostal groups like the Assemblies of God.

Sociology

Just as Adventism's theology is distinctive of a particular time and place, so too is its sociology. In the United States the social profile of a religious group often reflects the time when the denomination established itself in the New World, and its degree of liberalism or conservatism. Early arrivals which now have a liberal orientation like the Congregationalists or the Episcopalians have relatively high social status; middle of the road groups like the Baptists and Methodists whose success came later are rather lower, while nineteenth-century conservative newcomers like the Adventists, the Witnesses, and the Nazarenes are lower still, Adventist socio-economic status being on average above that of the Witnesses and a bit lower than that of the Nazarenes.

By looking at its theology, history, and sociology, we begin to get a synoptic view of Seventh-day Adventism. It is a nineteenth-century Protestant group, formed from the three most powerful dynamics of the period—apocalypticism, primitivism, and the Holiness revival. As such, it shares features with other nineteenth-century groups, formed under the same influences, that are now, in the United States, of a roughly similar size—notably the Witnesses (apocalypticism), the Disciples of Christ (primitivism), and the Church of the Nazarene (holiness). Even Adventism's astonishing global range is a characteristic of this formation, for its global reach is matched by only two other Protestant groups—the Witnesses and the Assemblies of God (the most internationally successful product of the Holiness revival).

The alternative trajectories available to Adventism in the past, and possibly also the future, are indicated by those of these other groups. Adventism could, like the Disciples of Christ, have embraced modernism early and become a liberal denomination, with a high socio-economic base, and, in recent decades, a sharply declining membership; it could, like the Nazarenes, have established itself as a conservative denomination, with a middling socio-economic ranking and steadily growing membership; or it could, like the Witnesses, have become a rapidly expanding international sect that attracts those with low socio-economic status. Adventism did not take the route followed by the Disciples (though it did drop one legacy of primitivism—its anti-Trinitarianism) and has instead followed a path somewhere between that of the Witnesses and the Nazarenes. It would be surprising if it diverged far from that trajectory within the foreseeable future.

Adventist Pasts 2: *Adventism's Golden Age*

Has Adventism ever had a golden age? Golden ages are sometimes real, often imagined, and everyone has a different idea of what constitutes one. But if there was a golden age in Adventism, a time when Adventists achieved their greatest success in disseminating their ideas to the general public, we think it was during the phase we call in our book the fundamentalist era in the church's development, a period that extends from the beginning of the 1920s to the end of the 1950s.

We call it fundamentalist because it was then that Adventists identified themselves with the fundamentalists in the wider Protestant world, who for much of this period were engaged in a fierce battle for the soul of American Christianity with their modernizing brethren. However, what makes this period stand out when you look back on it is the overall certainty the church had in its own distinctive beliefs, plus the conviction with which the denomination attempted to remake the world in its own image. The Adventists of the time were audacious, bold, and ambitious, which resulted in the publication of maybe the most influential works in Adventism's entire canon. Here's a reminder of eight that span the era:



First, George McCready Price's *The New Geology*, published in 1923. Drawing upon Adventism's traditional anti-evolutionism, the book basically invented creationism in America. It was a quite remarkable effort to correlate geological data with the Genesis flood that continued to influence fundamentalists more or less right to the end of the century.

Next, *Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories*, by Arthur S. Maxwell. These first appeared in England in 1924, and ran annually, according to the *SDA Encyclopedia*, for forty-eight years. It might seem unlikely to include a children's series, but no books helped to spread Adventism's idea of morality better than these. If you go on the Internet today, you'll find all sorts of people, Adventists and non-Adventists alike, reminiscing about the lasting effect they had on them as children.

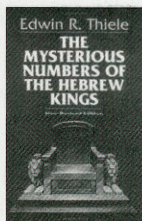


Third, *Back to Eden*, written by Jethro Kloss in 1939. This compendium of herbal medicine, natural foods, and home remedies effectively launched the health food movement as the world knows it today. The original book was published by the Madison school, so it came out of the self-supporting tradition. More than five million have been sold, and it is still selling, including in our local health food shops back in London.



Fourth is F. D. Nichol's *Midnight Cry*, published in 1944. This meticulous defense of the Millerite movement rescued Millerism from historical oblivion and ridicule and, by doing so, rescued a large part of Adventism's heritage in the process. It really is a marvel in separating myth from fact, and it altered the tenor of Millerite scholarship.

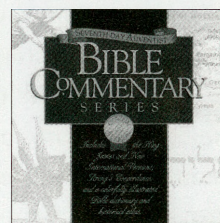
Fifth, Edwin R. Thiele's *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, published in 1951. In a way



this book did for the kings of Israel and Judah what *The New Geology* did for the Genesis flood. Based on Adventist assumptions that the Old Testament provided a literal record, the book correlated the chronology of the biblical kings with the history of contemporary civilizations like the Assyrians. It was an instant success. It is still in print after more than fifty years. It is still a required text in most seminaries in the United States.

Sixth, LeRoy Edwin Froom's *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, completed in 1954. The four massive volumes, in which Froom traced the history of Adventism's eschatology from the beginning of Christianity, remain the most astonishing piece of research undertaken by a single Adventist.

Seventh, *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, published in the 1950s, another huge project, supervised by F. D.



Nichol, which put Adventist biblical interpretation on a scholarly footing.



Finally, Maxwell's second entry in this list, the ten-volume *The Bible Story*, published between 1953 and 1957, which meant that by the end of this period Adventist children, too, had their own multivolume work that went together with the adult *Bible Commentary*. Like the *Bedtime Stories*, this was also bought by millions outside Adventism.

You can't, of course, reduce this period to these eight titles alone. This was also the time when the church embraced the new media of radio and television, accredited its schools, and conducted huge evangelistic campaigns in major world cities. But it is these eight titles that define the era most of all.

These texts also helped to give rise to what conservative Adventists have since called "historic Adventism." Some conservatives often mislead themselves into thinking that historic Adventism goes all the way back to the pioneers,

**Adventism has
never just
been about
preparing for
the end
and being like
the earliest
Christians.**

but this is the period to which they are really harking back.

From the perspective of today, you can criticize the wrongheadedness of some of these fundamentalist authors. McCready Price apparently worked out his laws about the geological column without ever going out to have a look at it. But the fact that he thought he could explain the geological column from his armchair says everything about his self-confidence.

A similar point can be made about Thiele. He was told by his supervisors at the University of Chicago, where he was doing his Ph.D., that since no one had solved the chronology of the biblical kings in two thousand years, he had absolutely no chance of doing so. But he thought that he could and went ahead. Adventists were never more confident than they were in this era.

What made Adventists so sure of themselves is an interesting question. The times may have had something to do with it. For much of the 1930s, America was in a depression and for the first half of the 1940s was engaged in a world war, and Adventism generally does well when the times are troubled. It was also, and this was probably the more important factor, a stable period theologically. There were stirrings of academic unrest at Pacific Union College and at Walla Walla College in the 1930s and 1940s, but they didn't amount to much. No one was arguing about the correct method for interpreting the Bible or the status of Ellen White. With no internal battles to fight, the church looked outward and embarked on nothing less than the intellectual and cultural conversion of society.

Adventists entered this period by making common cause with fundamentalists. But it is clear that as they go along they seek to draw the world on to their own ground rather than to stray onto the world's. What in the end brought this all to a halt was the publication in 1957 of the book that was both the climax of this golden age and its nemesis, *Questions on Doctrine*. The mistake the church made here perhaps was that it allowed itself to be drawn onto the world's ground instead of remaining on its own.

Thereafter, the church became less certain about its beliefs and less confident about taking them to the world. Adventists started arguing among themselves and became altogether more inward looking. As a result, Adventists never again published works that matched the ambition, breadth, depth, and global impact of those they produced in their fundamentalist period.

Adventist Pasts 3: *Denominationalization*

If the fundamentalist era was white Adventism's golden age, it was also an age of innocence, brought to an end by the temptation of public recognition. The period that followed, roughly that from the 60s to the 90s, was more self-conscious, but did the controversies that followed *Questions on Doctrine* also effect lasting change? In particular, was this, as many claimed at the time, the moment when Adventism renounced its sectarian past and took its place amongst the mainstream American denominations?

This is not an interpretation of Adventist history that we share—not because we want to consign Adventism to perpetual marginality, but because we think the history of the church is far too complex to fit the model of a unidirectional trajectory from sect to denomination. In our view, such a model both exaggerates the extent of Adventist marginality in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and overestimates the significance of the changes that have taken place in Adventism over the past fifty years.

Since the 1980s the tide has turned against theological liberalism, both within Adventism and within the wider culture, and the official theology of the church has, over the past two decades, effectively re-established its authority. But was it ever really threatened? In retrospect it seems that it was never seriously challenged. Even in the 60s and 70s Adventism had no single liberalizing tendency. (By that we mean one that sought to reinterpret existing doctrine in a way that reduced its tensions with the wider culture). Rather, there were two contemporaneous dynamics, which were trying to pull the church in different directions.

On the one hand there was the line of thinking initiated by *Questions on Doctrine*, developed by Edward Heppenstall, and more polemically by Robert Brinsmead and Desmond Ford, which attempted to recast Adventist soteriology in what was essentially an alien mold—one that emphasized original sin and justification by faith to the virtual exclusion of the development of a sanctified life modeled on the example of Christ. There was nothing intrinsically liberalizing about this shift, and its two leading exponents in Adventism—Brinsmead and Ford—were, if anything, temperamentally conservatives. What it represented was not a

move from the margin towards the center, so much as an attempt to pull Adventism away from its roots in the Arminian, Wesleyan, and Holiness traditions and towards the Reformed tradition—the tradition represented by Adventism’s interlocutors in *Questions on Doctrine*.


At the same time, something else was happening that was entirely unrelated. Thanks to the conjunction of a fully accredited medical school in Loma Linda and the rapid expansion of the California population, Adventism created in the middle years of the twentieth century a community of West Coast health professionals, with enough money and professional self-confidence to think that Adventism might be examined and refashioned from a perspective that was both life-enhancing and scientifically respectable. This found direct expression in the development, at Loma Linda, of a philosophy of holism that seamlessly merged issues of physical and spiritual well-being. But the medical community was also heavily involved in the Association of Adventist Forums, and its journal *Spectrum*, a journal that became a platform for the informed and critical discussion of Adventism.

Although the thinking of both movements appeared in the pages of *Spectrum*, there was probably never any real prospect of a lasting alliance between them. One was a clerical movement, the other primarily a medical one. Their theologies differed as well, for the medicalized form of Adventism which equated health and holiness was implicitly based on just the sort of soteriology that Brinsmead and Ford were rejecting. And whereas Brinsmead’s point of reference was the sixteenth-century reformers, Adventism’s medical community was interested in a form of belief and practice that would appear plausible to contemporary scientists. Although both were to some degree in conflict with traditional Adventism, they were also potentially at odds with each other, and there was little prospect that their combined efforts would result in a lasting change in Adventist belief and practice.

What happened instead was that the General Conference marginalized its critics and gradually brought the church back to its traditional theological positions. This may be a source of regret to some in the Forum generation, but liberalization or denominationalization is a mixed blessing, and it would be quite wrong to imagine that the transformation from sect to denomination is necessarily a desirable progression for a religious group. If a religion is in a high degree of tension with the surrounding culture (in other words, a sect), it is also distinguished from it in ways that may be attractive to those dissatisfied with what the wider culture has to offer; whereas if tension is reduced and differences diminish, the religious group no longer functions as a meaningful alternative.

In many ways, the most desirable option for any religious tradition is to maintain what some sociologists call “optimum tension”—in other words just enough to be attractively different, not so much as to be disturbingly strange. The changes that have taken place in Adventism over the years may perhaps be best seen as an ongoing attempt to find that optimal balance. And in this regard there are some interesting comparisons to be made with the Latter Day Saints. In a book titled *The Angel and the Beehive*, Mormon sociologist Armand Mauss tracked developments in Mormon belief and practice from the 30s to the 80s. He found that whereas mid-century Mormons were more liberal in their outlook, by the 1980s they had begun to affirm more conservative positions. His findings parallel the Adventist experience from the 1960s to the present, as Adventists too have moved back towards more conservative positions, rather than continued on the trajectories initiated in the 1960s and 70s. To people who remember the promise of those days, this may seem like a retreat, and in one sense it is, but it is also perhaps a reminder that Adventism, like Mormonism, may have responded tactically to changes in its environment, in an effort to maintain the optimum level of tension needed for its continued survival and growth.

**With no
internal
battles to
fight, the
church looked
outwards
and embarked
on nothing
less than the
intellectual
and cultural
conversion of
society.**

One of the things that has contributed to that growth has been Adventism's extraordinary ability to win people from all racial backgrounds. There is no other denomination in the U.S. that has done this to quite the same extent. So any review of Adventist pasts should give some account of the history of the relations among the different ethnic groups. It's not a particularly edifying history whichever way you look at it, characterized as it has been by feelings of mutual condescension, suspicion, discrimination, prejudice, and injustice. In other words, Adventist race relations have been no different to those that you find in the wider society.

And this is evident right from the start. Adventism began as a white, Anglophone faith. But this homogeneous state of affairs was soon ended by German and Scandinavian immigrants the church started converting from about the 1860s. Some leaders didn't particularly like these entrants, however. One, G. I. Butler, watched all these strange people coming in and wrote to William White that he was getting very suspicious of these foreigners.

This sort of attitude continued after the Adventist message was accepted by African Americans, who were to become the largest minority group in the church. The existing white members, though committed to working for them, did not actually believe that blacks were equal with them. The Adventist missionary, F. R. Rogers, said so to a city newspaper when he ran into trouble with white groups when he was evangelizing blacks in the South. Ellen White said so too, after attempting and failing to persuade the church to adopt an integrationist policy at the turn of the twentieth century.

Thereafter the white and African American memberships proceeded on largely separate paths: separate churches, separate schools, separate conferences, separate places of residence, and separate experiences of America, one rural and suburban, the other urban and metropolitan.

Whenever the two worlds collided, as they did from time to time, the black constituency inevitably came off worst. Some of these episodes have entered the darker recesses of Adventist folklore. But there is one story

that never loses its capacity to surprise no matter how many times you hear it. In 1944 a black Adventist called Lucy Byard fell ill when she was visiting Washington, D.C. She was taken to the Adventist Washington Sanitarium where she was refused treatment on account of the color of her skin. She was then rushed to the nearby Howard University Hospital. But the delay was fatal, and she died before she could be properly treated. One of the ironies of the situation was that at Howard she was attended by a black Adventist doctor, who would not have been allowed to work at the Washington Sanitarium either.

But of course no one race possesses a monopoly of prejudice. In one of Monte Sahlin's surveys he asked a question to determine the extent of racist attitudes among Adventists. The question, or rather the statement was "Racism is un-Christlike and immoral" and he asked his respondents to agree or disagree with it. Just 3 percent of Hispanics disagreed with the statement, and only 5 percent of whites disagreed as well. The interesting thing was that significantly more Asian Adventists responded negatively to the statement—10 percent of them disagreed with it.

But blacks were proportionately the most negative—21 percent of them disagreed with the statement, that is to say 21 percent did not believe that racism is un-Christlike and immoral. The number of the black respondents was lower than that of the other groups which may have affected the result but it may be quite a good indication that black Adventists are more willing to assert their racial identity, and are more open about doing so, than other ethnic groups in the church.

It is also the case that as African American numbers have increased, they have clearly wanted it both ways. They have sought and still seek full integration in the church, but they also prefer to remain separate when they choose. They are proud of the Oakwood school. They are intent on keeping the regional conferences. You are, however, getting a situation in places like metropolitan New York where the members of the regional conference are mostly of Caribbean origin, and the members of the original white conference are mostly of Caribbean and Hispanic origin as well. So you do have to ask what is the point of these structures when the original separation of whites and blacks that they were

designed to facilitate has been overtaken by demographic change? But they're still here, and stand as a witness to the historic segregation of white and black Adventism.

Tensions between the church's minority groups have been equally acute. In 2001 a pastor in the South Central Regional Conference posted a message on the conference blog about the mutual hostility that existed in the black constituency between African Americans and West Indians. According to an investigation he had carried out, African Americans feel that West Indians relate to them in a condescending manner; West Indians get the sense that they are not "black enough" for their African American brethren. In another of Monte Sahlin's opinion polls, a selection of pastors reported similar tensions across the board: between blacks and other races, between African Americans and Hispanics, between Anglos and other races.

Rather than have a consistent policy to take with them around the world, Adventists have merely mirrored the gulf wherever you find racially divided societies. In South Africa, the white worker, Pieter Wessels, wrote to Ellen White that he did not want his children to grow up "to think there is no difference in society that they should finally associate and marry into coloured blood." In Nazi Germany, the church simply went along with Hitler's notions of the master race and Aryan superiority. In the U.K. in the 1970s, the white Adventist leadership apparently did not see that black members were entirely unrepresented in the hierarchy of the church, just as the white establishment in the country were largely blind to institutional racism. As Yugoslavia disintegrated in the 1990s, bitter divisions broke out between Adventist Serbs and Adventist Croats, and in the Rwandan genocide, Adventist Hutus turned on Adventist Tutsis with murderous intent.

What all this shows is that the church worked out, brilliantly, how to attract people

of all colors, but not how they should live together. An early policy on civil rights might have made a difference. Statistics published by the sociologist Wade Clark Roof show that, interestingly, Adventists are relatively liberal on civil liberty issues but relatively conservative on civil rights. This is probably because the church has long had a religious liberty organization but never a civil rights organization. That it did not set up one must be one of the great lost opportunities in its history.

Adventist Pasts 5: *A Religion of the Ear*

When it comes to nurturing human spirituality, religions have tended to go down one of two paths.

There are those that appeal primarily to the eye and those that cultivate mainly the ear. Buddhism, with its statues and temples, falls in the former category. So does Catholicism with its focus on imagery, although Catholicism is very good at engaging all the senses, which may have something to do with its long-term success. The rosary utilizes touch, the mass involves taste, incense rouses smell, and that disembodied voice in the confessional booth employs hearing. Judaism, on the other hand, with its traditions of rabbinic dialogue, oral law, and ritualized prayer, appeals virtually exclusively to the ear, as does Protestantism, with its emphasis on preaching and the word.

Adventism, following in the Judaeo-Protestant tradition, is also primarily a religion of the ear. The sermon is dominant—lasting half an hour or more it is one of the lengthiest in all Christendom. Discussion is important, since members of all ages are expected to exchange ideas in Sabbath School class. All meeting places resonate with the sound of improvised prayer. You don't need to acquire

What all this shows is that the church worked out, brilliantly, how to attract people of all colors, but not how they should live together. An early policy on civil rights might have made a difference.

many skills to be an Adventist. But to get the most out of the experience of being one you do need to learn how to speak, and to articulate your thoughts, in public. As a result Adventists are quite good at talking. It's only when you step outside the community and discover the generally poor standard of public speaking that prevails elsewhere that you realize how well spoken, as individuals, Adventists are.

Now religions that appeal primarily to the ear are very distrustful of the eyes. The eyes deceive; they lead individuals astray; they are the source of idolatry and covetousness. In the Garden of Eden, Eve is seduced by the forbidden fruit because it is "pleasant to the eyes." When she and Adam do fall, the problem is now that their eyes are opened. The children of Israel are never allowed to see God. He himself forbids the making of graven images to distinguish his people from the visually sophisticated, idolatrous nations all around them. Samson loses his way, and eventually his sight, after he pursues a Philistine woman who is pleasing to his eyes. As God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah he tells Lot's wife not to look back; she does so and is turned into a pillar of salt. Matthew talks about false Christs appearing in the last days bewitching the world with "signs and wonders."

In the Bible, the ear, by contrast, is regarded as a reliable conduit of information and perception. The Israelites may not be able to see God but they hear the voice of God all the time. The sound of shouting and trumpets brings down the walls of Jericho. The Israelites are instructed to make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Paul says in Romans that "faith cometh by hearing." The superiority of the ear over the eye is perfectly illustrated in the description in Revelation of the symbol Adventists chose to represent America, the two-horned beast. If you just use your eyes, you will be fooled by the beast's lamblike appearance. You have to listen to its voice in order to discern the true diabolical nature of the apocalyptic monster.

Taking over this aural tradition in full, the Protestant reformers very effectively portrayed Catholicism as a false religion of the eye because of its images and ornate places of worship. Adventists have similarly avoided iconography and gaudy buildings. But for Adventists there was one additional formative event that gave them lasting cause to distrust the evidence of

their eyes. On October 22, 1844, the pioneers had expected to see Jesus return to the earth. As the text told them: "every eye shall see him." But he did not appear. They still thought something happened on that day though, and decided that sight was not the right way to recognize what it was. They then constructed an explanation that was hidden from the eyes: Christ, they said, had merely moved from one part of the heavenly sanctuary to another to begin the process of the investigative judgment. Many aspects of Adventism are intangible in this sense. There are the angels that monitor human behavior that you also cannot see. The great controversy between Christ and Satan itself is invisible. Much of what Adventism is about is located out of sight.

The concrete part of Adventism is heard not seen. The best way of appreciating the Adventist past in a way is just to listen to it. What you hear as you journey through the denomination's history is a variety of different sounds: the sound of shouting, which predominated in Adventist worship in its earliest days; the sound of debate both among Adventists and between Adventists and outsiders; the sound of the evangelist as he or she brings the Adventist message to all quarters of the globe; and the sound of music. As with other religions in which hearing predominates, music is Adventism's most developed art form. It is the same in Judaism, and the same in Protestantism. It's not by chance that someone has written that Adventism's favorite film is *The Sound of Music*.

Echoing through the popular culture of Adventism are the hymns of F. E. Belden, the harmonies of the King's Heralds, the mellow voice of Del Delker, and the sweet sounds of Wedgwood, the Heritage Singers, the Breath of Life Quartet, and others. And forming a major part of the soundtrack of the Western world is the music of Adventist and former Adventist performers like Little Richard, Prince, Shirley Verrett, Faith Esham, Busta Rhymes, Al Jarreau, Thomas Hampson, and Frederick Hibbert—singers who have left an indelible mark in genres from rock to opera to reggae.

It's interesting that the church has always tried to proscribe different styles of music, but the development of a popular musical culture within the church, and the production of a continuous line of famous musicians who sold millions of records outside it, does show the futility

of this in some respects. Those of particular talent will pursue their careers in the wider world if the church is too restrictive, while all the internal acts from the King's Heralds onwards borrowed their styles from popular groups outside Adventism and then smuggled those styles back into the denomination. Adventist ears are highly educated and those of Adventist musicians are more educated than most. To them a good sound is a good sound and they will use it wherever it comes from, whether the church approves of it or not, or whether ordinary church members are aware of it or not.

Of course Adventists have produced individuals who excel in the other arts, those who write novels and plays, and others who design, sculpt, and paint. And the way in which these creative people have interpreted the Adventist experience is fascinating. Mei Ann Teo's *Red Books* drama is the latest example of that. Then there are the visions of Ellen White. Now these do give her the means to see what others can't. Her visions, actually, function as a sort of extra-sensory pair of eyes for the whole community, making visible what would otherwise remain invisible. But like the Old Testament prophets she is the only one in Adventism who is permitted to view the heavenly world. But as no one can see what she can see, everyone else has to take on trust what she says about that world when she reports back. So the rest of the community, in the end, have to fall back on the word and to rely on their ears.

There are cultures where the ear deceives. One thinks of the siren sound in classical mythology, luring sailors onto the rocks. But that's not the case in Adventism, where the ear is the main fountain of truth. As such, it is the reason for Adventism's traditional reliance on sound instead of sight, and because sound extends through time rather than space, it also highlights the Adventist preference for time over space.

Adventist Futures 1: *Ethnicity*

The future of Adventism in the United States will, in our view, be defined primarily by the changing ethnic composition of its membership. Over the past half century Adventism in America has been transformed from a white church, with a small African American minority, into a multi-ethnic church in which whites represent only about half the membership, African Americans almost a third, Hispanics about one eighth, with Asians and Native Americans making up the rest.

This represents a fundamental and probably irreversible shift in the nature of Adventism in America, with consequences that will affect every area of Adventist life. The cause is primarily the rapid growth in immigration to the U.S. Adventism in America has always benefited from immigration, notably that of Scandinavians and Germans in the nineteenth century. But the new wave of immigrants is more noticeable and may be less easily assimilated by Adventism's white Anglophone majority.

In general, we are wary of extrapolating from trends in European Adventism, which operates within a dissimilar and in some ways more hostile cultural environment, but in this case it may give an indication of future trends across the Atlantic. In almost every European country the indigenous membership is static or declining, with growth occurring only as a result of either migration from outside Europe (notably Africa and the Caribbean) or as the result of intra-European migration from Eastern to Western Europe (notably from Romania to Italy and Spain). The result has been that membership in countries with low immigration, like those in Scandinavia, is in absolute decline, while Western European countries like the United Kingdom, France, Spain and Italy now have immigrant majorities of up to 80 percent. In most cases, immi-

**Adventism is
in the process
of changing
from soup to
salad.**

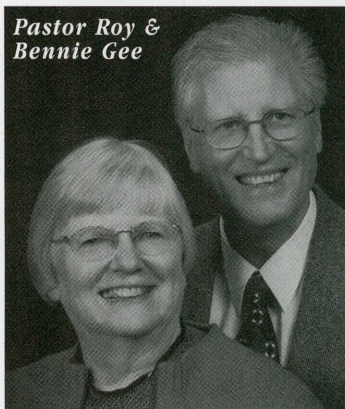
grants are dominant in metropolitan areas, while the surviving indigenous members are left clustered around Adventist institutions, with elderly people scattered in more rural areas.

A similar pattern will probably develop in North America as well; indeed, in many places it is already established. Adventism's white community is aging and has the poorest rates of retention and recruitment of any ethnic group. We would therefore expect it to continue to decline in relative and possibly also absolute terms. However, it will probably try to continue its traditional way of life, while ignoring the fact that its geographical orbit is ever more restricted. On the West Coast, we might anticipate a pattern of reverse migration where white Adventists move away from California and head back north to Adventism's traditional heartland in Oregon, eastern Washington, and Idaho. But overall, the relative importance of West Coast Adventism will continue to diminish relative to that of the Southeast, not traditionally an area of strong Adventist penetration, but now the first stop for migrants from the Caribbean and Central America.

For other ethnic communities, by contrast, the pattern is likely to be one of geographical expansion, so that they end up forming a patchwork of diasporas in which there are stronger links within dispersed ethnic groups than there are between neighboring Adventist communities of differing ethnicity. Such networks will also extend back to the place of origin, in the Caribbean, Central America, or Korea. Samuel Huntington offers three visions of a multi-ethnic United States: as a melting pot (in which a new ethnicity is created from multiple ingredients); a tomato soup (in which one ethnic group is dominant and other ingredients float within it); and a salad (a form of cultural pluralism in which each ethnic group remains distinct). On current evidence, Adventism is in the process of changing from soup to salad.

In theological terms, it has been noticeable that black and Hispanic Adventists have evinced little interest in white Adventist attempts to liberalize Adventist belief and practice. This may perhaps be attributed to different cultural styles or religious backgrounds, but we think there may be something more fundamental at

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity!"
PSALM 133:1

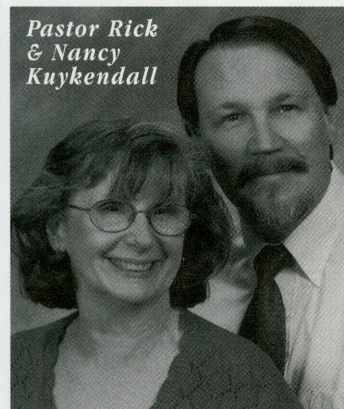


Pastor Roy & Bennie Gee
Auburn Gospel Fellowship
"A Safe Place for God's Grace"

10:45 a.m. Sabbath



710 Auburn Ravine Road,
Auburn, CA 95603 | 530.885.9087



Pastor Rick & Nancy Kuykendall
First Congregational Church of Auburn
"Striving to be an Enlightened Christian Community"

10:00 a.m. Sunday



Two Congregations . . . One Holy Church

stake. Both within the United States and elsewhere there is a very close correlation between ethnicity and religion, to the extent that the latter often functions as the primary cultural expression of the former. Adventism's success in converting people from a multitude of ethnic backgrounds both within the United States and elsewhere is unusual and one of its most remarkable achievements. How has this been possible? Global missionary faiths (like global consumer brands) are characterized less by their adaptability to local conditions than their relative uniformity. It is Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, and Adventists who share the distinction of being both ethnically mixed communities within the United States, and internationally successful all over the world.

Such inclusivity has been made possible not by having fuzzy edges but rather as a result of having clearly defined beliefs and structures. Anyone can be a Catholic, a Witness, a Muslim, or an Adventist because what you need to believe and do is heavily prescribed. In contrast, a religious group that expects people to work things out for themselves, and agree solutions with their fellow members, is liable to be implicitly reliant on shared cultural assumptions. This is one reason that, for all their self-conscious inclusivity, religious groups with very liberal theologies tend to travel badly and remain tied to their original cultural or ethnic context. Unitarian Universalism, for example, which tries to embrace all believers, and might therefore sound like a faith that everyone could share, has scarcely been able to travel beyond its place of origin in Boston, let alone spread around the world.

Martin Marty once said that ethnicity is the skeleton of American religion, by which he meant it is not something you see on the surface, but an endoskeleton that articulates the structure beneath the skin. To adapt the metaphor, you might say that Adventism has never had an ethnic endoskeleton to hold it

together, but rather an exoskeleton of doctrine that has allowed a series of minority ethnic groups to find shelter within it. If that hard outer shell started to soften, Adventism might become less rather than more hospitable to ethnic groups of every description.

Adventist Futures 2: Politics

Adventism in America has not up till now been known for its political engagement. There are many reasons for that, which we all know. One is the church's longstanding policy on the separation of church and state. It has believed that the practice of religion and that of government are incompatible activities and this has necessarily stymied its capacity to act politically. Another factor is that with an eschatology that already places the church in opposition to America it has been reluctant to see that conflict played out in the political arena because of its belief in the shortness of time.

A further reason is that church members have historically voted Republican, and the handful of Adventists who have been elected to Congress have almost all been Republican too. As believers in small government therefore, most Adventists have taken the view that it is not the business of government to ameliorate the ills of society in any event, so they have not been inclined to urge their political leaders to try.

Anyway, for all these kinds of motives the church in America has had minimal political impact, except on issues that have coincided with its beliefs such as prohibition, or else when its interests have been threatened by impositions like Sunday laws. On all the great progressive steps forward that you can think of—the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage in the early twentieth century, civil rights in the 1960s, or women's equality in the 1970s—the church has avoided direct action, not least

**According
to the latest
results
from the
cumulative
General
Social Survey
released
in 2006,
45 percent of
the member-
ship now
identify with
the Democrats
as opposed
to 37 percent
who identify
with the
Republicans.**

because for most of the time, it was battling against the equal rights of blacks and women within its own ranks.

Knowing this, Adventists have from time to time urged the leadership to get more involved in the political issues of the day. In the 1850s, some readers of the *Review* were outraged after the paper editorialized that it was pointless trying to do anything practical about slavery before the Second Coming. In the 1970s, articles appeared in *Spectrum* that argued that the church should be protesting about practices like the torture of political prisoners in Eastern Europe, South America, Africa, and China. And at the present time, various members, particularly those who contribute to the *Spectrum* blog and to the other blogs associated with it, are making new calls for the church to engage with the political world.

Our impression is that these calls are part of the wider reaction in the country to the uncompromising brand of neo-conservatism of the present White House, which, in turn, is partly a reaction to September 11. The other observation we would make about them is that, as they have been usually in the past, they are calls from the left. You never really get these pleas for intervention from Adventists on the right. In other words the current wish for a more politically active church is coming from Adventists who are basically sympathetic to the Democratic Party, who are of liberal mind, are concerned with social justice, and who believe in the efficacy of government in that they do think the state can and should be used to create fairer outcomes in society.

Whether today's campaigners will be any more successful than their counterparts in the past in pushing the church in a more progressive direction, we'll have to see. There is also a question mark as to whether the current interest in political activity will be sustained once Bush has gone and there is no Iraq war to protest against. But in the long term there is good cause to believe that Adventist politics are going to be more left wing, liberal, and activist than they have been hitherto. The main reason for thinking that is that Adventism is now largely a Democrat supporting church and may have been so for some time.

According to the latest results from the cumulative General Social Survey released in 2006, 45 percent of the membership now identify with the Democrats as opposed to 37 percent who identify with the Republicans. This is a historic shift, and since the GSS has been measuring party affiliation since 1972 it is possible to

see just when it occurred. Between 1972 and 1980, only 38 percent of Adventists were identifying with the Democrats and still 46 percent with the Republicans. However it was sometime between 1980 and 1990 that this situation turned round: on average 48 percent of church members now identified with the Democrats and 35 percent with the Republicans. Between 1990 and 2000 the figures were 45 percent Democrat, 35 percent Republican, and between 2000 and 2006, 43 percent Democrat and 31 percent Republican, indicating that the old Republican base may be dwindling quite sharply.

These statistics do not tally with all surveys of Adventist party affiliation, but they are not surprising given the ethnic changes that we have talked about. Black and Hispanic Adventists vote Democrat and as their numbers have grown they have pulled the membership as a whole to the left. Black Adventists in addition bring to the church a real history of political activism. To mention just one example, in 1944 a black Adventist woman called Irene Morgan refused to give up her seat on a bus in Virginia to a white couple, which resulted in the outlawing of Jim Crow segregation laws in 1946, and the very first freedom ride in 1947. It's interesting the Adventist media are now celebrating political stands like this. Irene Morgan received a glowing notice on the *Review* Web site when she died recently. Back in the 1940s the paper completely ignored the story. But the fact that it does now applaud such dissent may be another sign that the church is preparing for a more progressive future.

Adventist politics in America though are still mainly at the protest stage, coalescing around issues like peace or the environment, or around campaigns such as those for the disadvantaged. But in the normal pattern of political development individuals tend to move from merely complaining about conditions in the world to a belief that they can actually achieve more of their goals by exercising power. This transition has already been made by many Adventists in the Third World who have served as national legislators, government ministers, and even prime ministers.

At some point we expect that American Adventism will follow decisively down the same road. It will produce more representatives in the House, a senator or two perhaps, and finally, the holy grail, someone from within its ranks will run for president, and the *Review* will have to decide whether to endorse that candidate or

or she will probably have to explain to a skeptical media why they want to lead the country when they belong to a church that posits America as its ultimate eschatological enemy. But if they are as skillful as they ought to be at this stage, they should be able to answer a question like that, as Kennedy did when he was confronted by his Catholicism when he ran. No one should get too excited. Nothing like this is going to happen for several decades yet. Other minority faiths will get there first. The Mormons have already had a presidential candidate in this election. The Adventist candidate is unlikely to look anything like him though. He or she will probably be black or part black or Hispanic. If it is a male, he'll probably look a little like Barack Obama.

But there will be consequences. Political prescriptions by their very nature divide people. The same old dilemmas will still have to be faced. Is a proposed war just or unjust? Should you levy more tax or less tax? If we may quote our own recently retired Prime Minister Tony Blair, he always used to say that political leadership is about making decisions, and deciding one way or the other will inevitably alienate one section of the community or another. It will be the same if the church becomes more involved. Ellen White was right about this when she kept warning Adventists to steer clear of politics. A more politically committed church will be a more divided church. The present generation will have to decide whether that will be a price worth paying.

Adventist Futures 3: Demedicalization

In the earlier session, we talked about the way in which Adventism has tried, more or less successfully, to maintain an optimum degree of tension between distinctiveness and assimilation. Tension in this sense is not so much a feeling of constant anxiety, as being in a position where you have to make dif-

ficult choices between the expectations of your faith and the expectations of wider society. Such tensions exist even in Adventism's least sectarian environment, Loma Linda University medical school, and we now want to speculate about the ways in which these tensions might ultimately be resolved.

Adventists are justifiably proud of their medical school; for a minority religious group to operate a large and successful medical school has been an astonishing collective achievement. But there is an underlying tension between two of the institution's goals: the ambition to provide medical education for Adventists, and the ambition to run a medical school of the highest academic quality.

Loma Linda does not supply the data that would allow the medical school to be placed in the *US News and World Report* rankings (although it does do so for its nursing school). However, it is quite easy to calculate where LLU might come on some of the standardized measures used by *US News*. One such is the amount received in research awards from the National Institutes of Health. The NIH provide their own rankings on this every year, and over the past few years LLU has been coming in about 100th out of 125 medical schools. *US News* also calculates this figure on a per capita basis according to the number of faculty, and on this measure, LLU, which is by American standards a large school, would rank considerably lower. The other standardized ranking is provided by the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test) scores of matriculating students. These vary from year to year, and at LLU as elsewhere, they have been rising steadily over the past decade. But averaging things out over that period, we estimate it has been hovering somewhere between 80th and 100th out of 125.

This profile is much lower than that of other medical schools in California, and closer to that of smaller medical schools located in the South. In other respects as well LLU looks similar to a Southern medical school. Studies of the destinations of LLU graduates suggest that,

**Even as
Loma Linda
continues to
expand,
the importance
of medicine
in American
Adventism
may now be
diminishing.**

as with Southern schools, fewer physicians go into research and more set up practice in rural locations. So why does Loma Linda have the sort of profile you might expect of a medical school in Alabama or West Virginia when it is actually located in an urban area of California?

The answer is that it is Adventist. It is committed to admitting Adventist students and to providing excellence in teaching within a Christian clinical environment rather than being a research leader; in keeping with Adventist tradition, its graduates are more likely to practice in rural areas than metropolitan ones. In other words, LLU has a relatively low ranking and a "Southern" profile because it has different values, values that do not perfectly coincide with the values prevailing in the research-led, city-based medical schools of California.

This situation is elective. For example, LLU will admit Adventist students with MCATs below the average for other California schools, and in some cases, with scores that might not gain them admission to medical school anywhere. At the same time, LLU receives and turns down thousands of applications from non-Adventists, some of whom are, in academic terms, better quali-

fied. (A PUC graduate is perhaps ten times as likely to gain admission to LLU than a non-Adventist.) So Loma Linda could be a more academically selective (i.e., higher ranking) institution if it wanted to be, but only at the cost of being less religiously selective.

However, despite having a clear preference for Adventist medical students, LLU has, since the late 1980s, been unable to fill more than about seventy percent of its places with Adventists. In the long run, then, it faces a difficult decision. Become a higher ranking, but basically non-denominational institution. Or struggle to maintain an Adventist intake and remain a low-ranking Adventist one. What it cannot do, unless Adventism itself changes, is square the circle and become a high-ranking Adventist institution. Being forced to make choices like this is a measure of the persisting tension between Adventism and wider society.

It is not too difficult to guess how this tension is going to be resolved. Other schools at Loma Linda and La Sierra already have a predominantly non-Adventist intake, and Adventist hospitals are all predominantly staffed by non-Adventists, so it would be very surprising

Columbus, Ohio
October 5-7, 2008

i4CONFERENCE
The 4th Annual Conference on Innovation

Robert Wuthnow, Ph.D.
Princeton University

Leonard Sweet, Ph.D.
George Fox University

James Tucker, Ph.D.
University of Tennessee

Julius Nam, Ph.D.
Loma Linda University

Kelly Monroe
Director, The Veritas Forum

REGISTRATION \$99*
Call or Go Online
(740) 397-4665 [ext. 165]
www.sdapartnersininnovation.org
*for early-bird registration by August 5

Bringing scholarship, faith & experience together

if the medical school did not eventually go the same way. Apart from anything else, it is expanding, and is probably going to find it more, not less, difficult to recruit Adventists with the right academic qualifications, due to the changing geographical and ethnic balance in the church. LLU medical school is disproportionately white, relative to the Adventist membership and to the ethnicity of students at other California medical schools. But the white Adventist community in California that was created by and fed back into LLU is now declining, and although other ethnic groups are taking the place of whites in the church, they are not taking up their places in the medical school. Over time, therefore, the high demand for quality medical education in California and the low demand from qualified Adventists mean that LLU medical school is liable gradually to conform more to Californian than Adventist norms. In the process, it will start to move up the national rankings, at the same time as the proportion of Adventist students diminishes.

How will it all end? Will Loma Linda become the Battle Creek of the twenty-first century, an Adventist foundation but not an Adventist institution? It is impossible to say, but there can be little doubt that losing the medical school (in, perhaps, everything but name) would have a profound impact, for Loma Linda has an iconic status in world Adventism that extends far beyond its immediate clinical or educational role. Once, the medicalization of Adventism appeared to be a possible future trend. Now that phase may be moving into history and another possibility emerges—demedicalization (the declining importance of medical personnel and health-related philosophies within the life of the church).

There is some evidence of this already. In the interwar period, Adventism offered many more medical school places to its membership than were available to the rest of the population. Now, even if all the places at LLU med-

ical school were taken by Adventists, it would still mean that Adventism had a lower ratio of medical school places to population than that in the nation as a whole. Even as Loma Linda continues to expand, the importance of medicine in American Adventism may now be diminishing. If Loma Linda resolves its tensions by opting for increasing assimilation, it will, in the process, effectively leave Adventism behind. Without the medical school, it is hard to see how the medical orientation of Adventism will be sustained, and without Adventism's medical community, any counterbalance to clerical domination of the church may be lost as well.

Adventist Futures 4: *Adventism in the Year 2100*

In 100 years' time, if the church continues to double its membership every 11 years as it is now doing, there will be just over 1 billion Adventists worldwide. The United Nations' most reliable estimate indicates that the world population will have risen to 9.1 billion in 2100. On these projections one person in eight will be an Adventist. There will be no question then about Adventism being a global religion. No question either that it will be known and recognized as such.

A church of such size seems unimaginable, but there are today two world religions that claim a billion adherents. One is Islam, the other is Catholicism. The former has broken into competing factions, with no single head or central committee to run it. The latter is highly centralized, and still run from Rome through procedures that are recognizable from medieval times. Yet in both cases, these are faiths whose unchanging theologies act as points of reference for the diverse individuals who make up their vast communities.

If Adventist membership does indeed hit the 1 billion mark, it is not difficult to guess

**The church's
structures
look set. People
grumble
about them
but they have
worked for a
hundred
years. Who's
to say that,
with a modifi-
cation here or
there, they
won't work
for another
hundred?**

which of the two religions it is more likely to resemble. It won't be Islam.

Simply extrapolating from current rates of growth does not allow for slower growth in the world population as a whole, or the probability that Adventist growth rates will also decline as the church runs out of new territories to evangelize. On more realistic estimates, the church's membership will be somewhere between 100 and 250 million. What might the church be like then?

Even at the lower end of the range, Adventism would still be larger than any Protestant church in the world today. But none of the larger Protestant communions has managed to maintain doctrinal or cultural uniformity to the same degree as the Catholics. Here again, Adventism might follow one of two models: the worldwide Anglican communion, which acknowledges the primacy of Canterbury, but allows for considerable regional autonomy, and the Pentecostal movement, which is formed from a patchwork whose elements range from independent churches to global denominations. Once again, it is hard to believe that Adventism will not be closer to the more centralized Anglican model.

But even if the church remains relatively centralized, it won't be as easy to control Adventism as it now is. In terms of cultural traditions the church may not even try too hard to do so, turning a blind eye to different Adventist lifestyles in different parts of the world. The church has however set up committees to examine how present structures will cope as the membership rises during this century—one on administration, another on finance. These will make recommendations at the next General Conference session.

Our enquiries indicate that the changes won't be revolutionary. The conference layer may be scrapped in countries where there are few members (some nations like Denmark have already done this) and the departmental structure may no longer be required to be reproduced at every administrative level. On financing, the General Conference may well channel more funds to local churches. Otherwise, the church's structures look set. People grumble about them but they have worked for a hundred years. Who's to say that, with a modification here or there, they won't work for another hundred?

For similar reasons we think that Adventism will

still be recognizably an American creation, however many people are in it. The American proportion of the world membership will have dwindled almost to vanishing point in 2100. Other parts of the world will easily be able to outvote the home country on any matter. As a result there may be pressures to move the church headquarters outside America. But to do that would be like moving the Vatican from Rome. We don't think it will happen.

The church's theology will still be more or less what it is today, to provide a reference point for its members. There will still be a statement of 28 fundamental beliefs or something like it. The church will still be preaching the three angels' messages. The church may have hundreds of millions of members, but it will not be enough. New methods will still be being devised to reach the others who continue to elude the church.

On the other hand, Adventism may not be so male dominated. One global trend that has been identified by futurologists is the increase of women in pastoral roles. It is a tendency that Adventism may not be able to resist, despite the fact it is growing strongly in very patriarchal societies in the Third World, and our guess is that the constitutional change that was made at the last General Conference session that effectively barred a woman from ever leading the church will be reversed in time. The General Conference president in 2100 may be as likely to be a female as it is a male.

Predicting what the church will be like in 2100 is largely a fantasy exercise. But any accurate prediction may require a degree of fantasy. If you had asked Adventists in 1900, when the worldwide membership was 78,000, what the church would be like in the year 2000, they would have been astonished, not only that time was continuing, but by the fact that the membership had grown to 12 million. By 2100, Adventism's global progress could be just as astonishing. ■

Malcolm Bull teaches at Oxford University. **Keith Lockhart** is a London-based journalist. In 2007, Indiana University Press published the second edition of their book, *Seeking a Sanctuary: Seventh-day Adventism and the American Dream*.